



The Light

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Contents:

	Page
The call of the Messiah	1
Building Bridges through dialogue By Nasra Ali	1
Religious Pluralism (Continued)	4

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

The Call of the Messiah

by **Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad,**

The Promised Messiah and *Mahdi*

The claim of our Holy Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, shines forth like the sun and it is a great proof of his eternal life that his grace flows eternally. Even in this age a person who obeys the Holy



Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, is raised from the dead and is bestowed a spiritual life not merely in imagination, but through the display of his righteous effectiveness and of heavenly help and blessings and extraordinary support of the Holy Spirit. He becomes a unique person from among all mankind, so much so that God Almighty talks to him and discloses His special mysteries to him, and communicates his verities to him, and manifests the signs of His love and favour in him, and causes His help to descend upon him, and places His blessings in him, and makes him the mirror of His *Rahmaniyyat* (Beneficence). Wisdom flows from his tongue, and the fountains of fine points burst out of his heart. Hidden secrets are made manifest in him. God Almighty bestows a grand manifestation upon him and comes close to him. In the acceptance of his prayers, in the opening of the doors of understanding, in the disclosure of hidden mysteries and in the descent of blessings upon him, he ranks high and is supreme over all others. Having been commissioned by God Almighty, this humble one dispatched several thousand registered letters to well-known opponents of Islam in Asia, Europe and America about these matters, so that they might be conclusively established. I invited them that if anyone claimed that spiritual life could be achieved by any other means, without following the *Khatam al-Anbiya* (The Last of the Prophets), Holy Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, he should come forth in opposition to me, and that failing this he should come to me as a seeker-after-truth, in order to witness the blessings and signs that are bestowed on me; but no one turned in this direction with sincerity and in good faith and by their remaining aloof they proved that they are all floundering in darkness. (Ayena-i-Kamalat-i-Islam, pp. 221-222).

I Shall Love All Mankind.

BUILDING BRIDGES THROUGH INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOUGE – 2

Nazra Ali

(Delivered on 30 April 2016 at Horsham Inter-faith Service)

Continued from the last issue

Therefore, difference of opinion amongst people is indeed a blessing of free will as God tells us in the Quran in ch. 11 v. 118: "And if thy Lord had pleased, He would have made people a single nation. And they cease not to differ".

Here the Quran states that God purposely did not make us one single nation agreeing on every issue, but he made us different with different opinions, different likes and dislikes, and allowed us to think differently so we developed the power to search for Him through his Creation and by questioning — a true act of Love on His behalf. Interestingly, some who are scientifically inclined have come to a decision that God does not exist! Our free will and extensive experiments have led them to conclude, that creation and evolution is without direction or cause.

Harmony as Human Beings

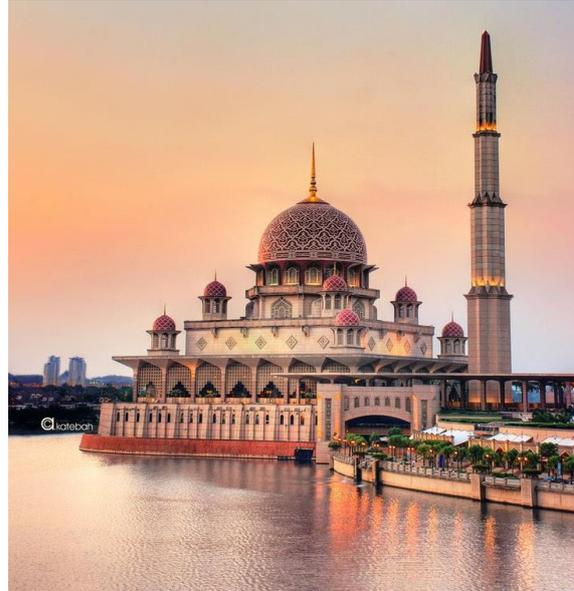
The Quran tells us in ch 49 v. 13: "O Mankind Surely we have created you from male and female and made you tribes and families that you may know each other. Surely, the noblest of you with Allah is the most dutiful of you. Surely Allah is Knowing, Aware."

None of us here can deny that we have parents, so a male and a female is responsible for our being here. We can identify each other by our phenotype (physical feature), our tribe, and we have become families through marriages and intermarriages, another way that allows us to manage and tolerate our differences of opinions, i.e., through the love fostered by intermarriage.

Most importantly the Quran says the noblest of you is the most dutiful of you. Here the Quran addresses all people of all faiths and specifically states that our duty to humanity is what

distinguishes us in the sight of God. So to answer the first question – the Quran encourages interreligious harmony and dialogue as we all came from the same source and we all worship the God of Adam and Abraham.

To answer the second question, we have to



look at the history of the Prophet Muhammad (s). From the history of the life of the Prophet we read that the Prophet's first meeting with a Christian occurred when he was a young boy aged between nine or twelve. He joined his uncle's merchant caravan for a trip to Syria. The Christian whom the Prophet Muhammad(s) encountered was a monk by the name of Bahira, who was living in Bostra, a Roman colonial city. Bahira was known for his belief that a prophet was soon to appear among the Arabs. Bahira had studied old manuscripts, where he had learned of the coming of a final prophet, and he was convinced that this prophet would appear in his own lifetime. When he actually saw Muhammad as a child during a trade expedition he realized that he carried all the signs that the awaited Prophet was to have, as described in his books. He told Muhammad's uncle to take him back to Makkah as soon as possible in order to guard him against potential enemies.

Another significant meeting with a Christian was when the Prophet first his received revelation. It had a great impact on him. Following this unusual experience, he went home, feeling ill. His wife Khadija took the Prophet to

I Shall Love All Mankind.

Waraqa (a learned Christian Monk) and told him about the revelation. Waraqa was a respected man of his time and a well-known Christian scholar. After listening to Prophet Muhammad (s), Waraqa said that it was Gabriel, the Angel of Revelation, who had come to him, just as he had come to Moses.

Waraqa was an open-minded man; he converted from paganism to Christianity and also understood the features of the revelation that had been given to Muhammad. He sincerely supported Muhammad as a Christian believer when he understood that he was the awaited prophet, after Moses and Jesus, peace be upon them. Waraqa encouraged Muhammad to continue his call, without any doubt that God would protect him. This is a fine example of cooperation between a well-known Christian scholar and the would-be Prophet.

Muslims as Refugees in a Christian Country

When the Messenger of God began to declare his message openly, the Makkan pagans started to severely oppose him and the new Muslims, making many problems for them. Several Muslims died, with even more being humiliated and excluded. The Prophet realized that Makkah was becoming a difficult place for Muslims to live in.

He decided to send some of them to Abyssinia, especially those who had no effective protection; Abyssinia at the time was ruled by a Christian ruler. The Prophet told the group that King (Negus) of Abyssinia was a Christian, so they would be safe there. At the outset, eleven Muslims immigrated to Abyssinia. Later, they were joined by about 83 adult Muslims, women and men. When the first Muslim guests arrived there, they met with the King. Ja'far, as leader of the immigrants, gave the Prophet's letter to the King.

The King welcomed them and promised to protect them from their enemies. In the royal presence a question was put to them: "What do you say concerning Jesus?" The spokesman for the group replied: "Concerning Jesus, we can only say what our Prophet has taught us: Jesus is the servant and messenger of God, the spirit and word of God, whom God entrusted to the Virgin Mary." When the King Negus heard this testimony, he picked up a twig from the ground and said: "I swear, the difference between what we believe about Jesus, the Son of Mary, and what you have said, is not greater than the width of this twig."

Here we see that the Muslims fled to a Christian country as refugees. Today, we see a similar exodus happening where refugees are coming to Europe from Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya.

Christians Prayer in the Prophet's Mosque

In the year 10 A.H. (631 CE), Prophet Muhammad (s) received a delegation of sixty Christians from Najran in Madinah. They were received in the Prophet's mosque, and the Prophet allowed them to pray in the mosque, which they did facing East.

They discussed with the Prophet the points of doctrine including the nature of God, and he replied to them by reciting *Surah Ikhlas* (ch. 112 of the Qur'an). Further discussion on the nature of Prophet Jesus (s) led to some disagreements, on which he recited to them the three verses of the Qur'an from *Surah Ale-Imran* (3:59-61). After three days, the Christian delegation decided to conclude its mission.

In spite of doctrinal disagreements, the Prophet concluded a treaty with the people of Najran. The treaty provided religious and administrative autonomy for non-Muslim citizens of the Islamic State. This is the total opposite to what we see today with ISIS, forcing people to



I Shall Love All Mankind.

give up their faith at the point of death. No wonder Allah tells us in the Quran, ch 5 v 82: "And thou wilt find the nearest of them in affection to those who believe (to be) those who say: Lo! We are Christians. That is because there are among them priests and monks, and because they are not proud."

Other verses of the Quran also encourage interreligious dialogue and urge Muslims to discuss, invite to the way of the Lord with wisdom and discuss religious doctrine in a polite manner: "Call to the ways of your Lord with wisdom and Godly exhortation, and argue with them in the best manner. Surely your Lord knows best him who strays from His path, and He knows best those who go aright" (16:125).

Today we see in the media, suicide bombings, ISIS trying to create an Islamic state by forcing non-Muslims to accept Islam and the destruction of places of historical interest and places of worship. None of this type of behaviour is supported by the Quran or the conduct of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (s). In ch 22, v 40, the Quran prohibits the destruction of any place of worship when it says: "Those who are driven from their homes without a just cause except that they say: Our Lord is Allah. And if Allah did not repel some people by others, cloisters, and churches, and synagogues, and mosques in which Allah's name is much remembered, would have been pulled down. And surely, Allah will help him who helps Allah. Surely Allah is Strong, Mighty."

So the Quran is clear that there should always be dialogue between People to whom scriptures were given. The Quran even goes so far as to say that marriage with and the food of the people of the book is permitted for Muslims.



The message to build bridges and have interfaith dialogue is a clear injunction in the Quran and a duty on Muslims. And from the example of the Holy Prophet Muhammad, non-Muslims, their persons, property, business, rights and places of worship, and freedom to worship are all protected by Islam.

So why do we see the opposite of this today. It is because it is easier to do the wrong things than it is to walk the straight path. It is because the media needs to sell us something and keep us talking. If weapons trade cease to exist the economies will suffer, jobs will be lost. The Quran says: "There is no compulsion in religion" (2:256), so why are non-Muslims being compelled to give up their faith?

The Islam as taught and lived by the Holy Prophet Muhammad (s) has been shunned by the so-called Islamic world today. It appears that Muslims would rather be recognised for their outer garment than for their inner piety. I am here today because of a pious Christian woman who disliked Muslims for what they are doing to the world but saw Islam not in my outer garment but from my heart. We share love for each other and for humanity. Why can't we all have love for each other and respect each other's faith. We all believe in the prophets in our books, we believe in Adam and Eve and in Abraham and his family, in Mary and Jesus. We all believe in ashes to ashes, dust to dust, from God we came and to him we shall return.

We all believe in the purification of the soul, a concept found in all scriptures. In the Quran it is called the soul at rest, and the bible addressed it as: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Matthew 5:8). In Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism it is called Nirvana. The Torah also speaks of purification of the soul.

In all scriptures God refers to himself as "the One God", the Supreme being, the originator and sustainer of all the worlds.

The Quran and Mary

For those who do not know what the Quran says about Mary, an entire chapter, ch. 19, is dedicated to her. The Quran also says: "O Mary, indeed Allah has chosen you and purified you

I Shall Love All Mankind.

and chosen you above the women of the worlds” (3:42).

In the Quran God also says: “And the servants of (Allah) Most Gracious are those who walk on the earth in humility, and when the ignorant address them, they say, Peace!” (25:63). Therefore, without dialogue between people of all faiths and no faiths the vacuum in communication and understanding can quickly and easily be filled with mistrust, prejudice, bigotry and racism. Without dialogue and mutual respect extremism and hatred can grow.

Mahatma Ghandi wrote: “Be the change you wish to see in the world”. In order to be the change, we need to appreciate each other without any prejudices. If we as people of different faiths, who are conscious of a Creator, do not work together to bring about Love, Peace, Respect and Harmony our next generation will only exist rather than live and be happy.

We have to stand together to defeat terrorism of every kind. Let this be the first of many Interfaith services. Our community, the Lahore Ahmadiyyah Movement in Islam, will be hosting an Interfaith service in November 2016 and we extend an invitation to you all. The topic will be “How does my Religion promote peace”. Let us go one step further and have a multi-religious family day and demonstrate to the world how to live in a multi-religious and multicultural society in the 21st Century.

An Analysis of Prophet Muhammad’s Covenants with Christians

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(Continued from the June 2016 issue)

Prophet Muhammad, nonetheless, did enforce the jizya, or poll tax, on Christian communities. In fact, the jizya is enforced in all of the

Covenants discussed in this paper. The jizya is one area in which Christians criticize Islam for its oppression and creation of “second-class” citizens in Muslim societies. However, the Prophet made it clear in the Covenants with the Christians of Mount Sinai, Persia, Najran, and the World that in the levying of taxes, it is necessary not to exact from Christians more than they are able to pay. Rather, Muhammad asks Muslims “to adjust matters with their consent, without force or violence”. The Prophet added “Whosoever shall not do as is here prescribed, but shall do contrary to my behests; the same shall be held a despiser of the Compact, and a gainsayer of the word of God and of his Prophet”. Similarly, in the Covenant with the Christians of the World, Prophet Muhammad suggested that, in extraordinary cases, the jizya can be dismissed altogether: “I remove from them the harm from taxes and loan in the supplies borne to the People of the Pact except what they themselves consent to give. They should not be compelled or unfairly treated in this matter”. Nonetheless, the money that Muslims collected through the jizya was to be placed in the Treasury for public use. This is an important point because corrupt individuals or groups were not meant to acquire money collected through the jizya. The jizya was collected for the betterment of the “public good”, of which Christians were a part. It is also worth noting that during the reign of Umar, the third¹ Caliph of the Muhammad and Companion of Prophet Muhammad, the jizya was abolished in light of all non-Muslims that were unable to earn their livelihood. Such conditions were clearly stated in contracts and other documents signed by Muslims and non-Muslims during the reign of Umar.

Prophet Muhammad was a religious pluralist because he engaged in “a form of proactive cooperation that affirms the identity of the constituent communities while emphasizing the well-being of each and all”. Consider how he embodied religious pluralism in his Covenant with the Christians of Najran:

“The Muslims must not abandon the Christians, neglect them, and leave them without

¹ Hazrat Umar (r) was the second khalifa and not third – Editor.

help and assistance since I have made this pact with them on behalf of Allah to ensure that whatever good befell Muslims it would befall them as well and that whatever harm befell Muslims would befall them as well.”

The passage encapsulates the spirit of religious pluralism in that it fosters mutually inspiring relationships and common action among members of different religious groups for the “common good”. As Patel and Meyer remind us, religious pluralism is “not simply relativism, but makes room for real and different religious commitments”. In the Covenant with the Najrans, Muhammad encourages Muslims and Christians to become mutually dependent upon one another for safety and prosperity. Benevolence, encouraging goodwill, commanding charity, and deterring evil are the sincerest mechanisms to reaching these aims. This particular passage from the Covenant with the Christians of Najran aligns closely to verse 16:91 of the Qur’an: “And fulfil the covenant of Allah, when you have made a covenant, and do not break (your) oaths after making them firm, and you have indeed made Allah your surety. Surely Allah knows what you do”. On the other side of the spectrum, however, there are verses of the Qur’an that can be viewed as contradicting the messages of the Covenants. For example, the Qur’an (9:29) commands Muslims to “Fight those who do not believe in Allah, nor in the Last Day, nor forbid what Allah and His Messenger have forbidden, nor follow the Religion of Truth”, which can be interpreted to mean fight “infidels”, or non-believers, such as Christians. In the Qur’an, however, the term “infidel” is not just a noun or an adjective; “infidel” is the word that the Qur’an uses to describe exclusively the Meccan aristocracy with which the Muslim community was at war with. Scholars of the Qur’an tell us that verses dealing with “infidels” are not meant to encourage the use of violence among Muslims. In fact, “such an interpretation is completely false and contradicts authentic Islamic teachings”. Consider the following commentary for further evidence of the defensive nature of verse 16:91:

“If the non-Muslim country did not attack the Muslim one nor mobilize itself to prevent the practice and spread of Islam, nor transgress

against mosques, nor work to oppress the Muslim people in their right to profess their faith and decry unbelief, then it is not for the Muslim country to attack that country. Jihad of a military nature was only permitted to help Muslims defend their religion and remove oppression from the people.”

The context of Qur’an (9:29) must also be placed in its proper historical context. The Byzantine Empire, the great Christian power of the time, had mobilized its forces to fight against the rise of Islam. As Ali notes, the use of force against Christians “was not in any way the object of the Qur’an to bring the Christians into subjection.” On the other hand, the Christians “first moved themselves to bring Muslim Arabia under subjection”. Prophet Muhammad did not initiate aggression; rather he and his followers were under attack from those groups who wanted to destroy the Islamic state. As for fighting the Jews, they had conducted a peace pact with the Prophet after he migrated to Medina. Soon afterwards, as Musaji notes, “they betrayed the peace pact and joined forces with the pagans and the hypocrites against Muslims”. Therefore, the command to fight in verse 9:29 was not directed towards all Christians, only those who were aggressive and threatening violence against the ummah.

The equitable ethos of the Covenants—in tandem with the Qur’an—challenge those who declare Islam as fundamentally intolerant of Christians. In line with the message of the Covenants, the Qur’an (5:82) establishes Prophet Muhammad as an admirer of Christians: “. . . you will find the nearest in friendship to the believers to be those who say, we are Christians. That is because there are priests and monks among them and because they are not proud”. In the Covenant with the Monks of Mount Sinai, Muslims and Christians are asked to work with one another in order for members of each group to recognize valuable gains in interfaith interaction:

“If in the interest of the benevolent Moslem public, and of their faith, Moslems shall ask of the Christians for assistance, the latter shall not deny them what help, as an expression of friendship and goodwill, they are to render. . . we deem all help and succour rendered totem every way legitimate.”

I Shall Love All Mankind.

This passage follows Patel in that pluralism occurs when people of different religious traditions make their unique contribution for the common good of society by actively assisting each other in ways that are mutually beneficial to both parties. The nearest Arabic word that captures the essence of this passage is *al-tasamuh*, often translated as meaning “tolerance”. “*Tasamuh*” denotes generosity and ease from both sides on a reciprocal basis”. Building on Abdel Haleem, Kamali argues that the more precise Arabic equivalent of pluralism is *al-ta’addudiyah*, which he translates literally to mean “pluralism”. Prophet Muhammad’s commitment and recognition of diversity is not an attempt to assimilate Christians into Muslim society; on the contrary, this kind of “deep pluralism” recognizes religious and cultural differences and engages in them in order to gain a sound understanding of the values and commitments of the different other.

At this stage of the paper, it is important to distinguish Prophet Muhammad’s religious pluralism from toleration, which allows only for co-existence. In addition to encouraging Muslims and Christians to form bonds of solidarity, he advises individuals in each group to vigorously defend each other. The Covenant with the Christians of Persia reads:

“All pious believers shall deem it their bounded duty to defend believers and to aid them whosoever they may be, whether far or near, and throughout Christendom shall protect the places where they conduct worship, and those where their monks and priests dwell. Everywhere, in mountains, on the plains, in towns and in waste places, in deserts, and wheresoever they may be, that people shall be protected, both in their faith and in their property, both in the West and in the East, both on sea and land.”

The text declares that defending Christian communities is the responsibility of the *um-mah*. The text, furthermore, states that membership of a particular religious grouping does not set the standard of citizenship in Muslim nations. With regard to Christian citizens, the Prophet valued them and validated their beliefs by protecting them by means of his army. In the Covenants with the Christians of the World, he echoed the treatment of the Christian of the World by stating:

“The covenant of Allah is that I should protect their land, their monasteries, with my power, my horses, my men, my weapons, my strength, and my Muslim followers. . .I place them under my protection, my security, and my trust at every moment.”

Muhammad’s protection of Christian communities is diametrically opposed to Muslim absolutists who view Christians as morally inferior to Muslims and thus incapable of becoming equal members of an Islamic state. Consider several recent events during which Daesh destroyed the property of Christians. In July 2014, Daesh set fire to an 1800-year-old church in Iraq’s second largest city, Mosul. A statement released by Daesh a week before this incident stated that Mosul’s Christians should convert, pay a special tax, leave, or face death. Months later, in February 2015, Daesh members rounded up 220 Christian civilians in the village of Tal Tamir and burned two Christian churches. According to reports, they were peaceful villages that had nothing to do with the war. The Covenants show that Muslim leaders are not advised by Muhammad to prohibit citizens from expressing non-Muslim identities or ruin churches, but are instead commanded to treat them as equal members of the *um-mah*.

Considering that the “People of the Book” have a special status in the Islamic tradition, critics have wondered about the rights of non-Abrahamic communities living inside the territories of the *um-mah*. Muslims during the time of Prophet Muhammad used the term “polytheists” to refer to people who do not have a tradition of a revealed book in their religion. A hadith reports a particular story that highlights the Prophet’s position on dealing with religious groups outside of the Abrahamic tradition. In calling his Muslim army to defend themselves against polytheist aggression towards the *um-mah*, the Prophet stated:

“don’t exaggerate, don’t cheat, don’t mutilate, don’t kill a new-born child. If you meet your enemies of polytheists call them for one of three options. Whatever they take, you must accept, and stop fighting them. Call them to Islam ... they will have the same rights and duties of the immigrants.”

Although he encouraged Muslims to engage in defensive warfare against the polytheists, it is

I Shall Love All Mankind.

clear that Muhammad was willing to grant them the same rights that he would later grant Christians (immigrants) in the Covenants. History shows us that Muslim rulers and empires followed in the footsteps of Prophet Muhammad by granting non-Abrahamic communities privileges and political rights under "Islamic rule." For example, governments of the Indian subcontinent readily extended the *dhimmi* status to Hindus and Buddhists of India. On several occasions throughout history, Muslim rulers and jurists eradicated the *jizya*. Akbar the Great of the Mughal Empire abolished the *jizya* in relation to Hindus, Buddhists, Jains, and Sikhs under his rule. To reiterate, it is worth remembering that each of the Covenants discussed in this paper include a passage on how to levy the *jizya*. Muslims are not to enforce the tax on Christians without their consent, nor are Muslims able to enforce the *jizya* with force or violence. Furthermore, as Prophet Muhammad noted in the Covenant with the Christians of Najran, the charges of the *jizya* shall not exceed the measure of their means, meaning that taxes should not be excessive and be judged based on individual cases depending on the status of the citizen.

The Muslim Nation as a Civic Nation

Having considered the concept of religious pluralism in the Covenants, the paper now takes up the discussion of civic rights among members of the "Muslim nation". Scholars have dedicated much time and effort to unpack the various kinds of nation-building projects, but the distinction between "civic nation" versus "ethnic nation" is perhaps the most widely-employed conceptual building block in the study of nationhood and national identity. While these types of nations share common elements like historical territory and common culture, they have distinct features. An ethnic nation bases national group membership upon qualities such as ancestry, marriage, and blood. In this sense, an ethnic nation is an exclusive nation because it places emphasis on historical experiences and the resulting phenotypes that outline

the boundary of the "natives." Some contemporary scholars argue that Eastern European and Asian countries are historical examples of ethnic nations while Western European countries and the United States are historical examples of civic nations. In the "Eastern model", nationalism arises in polities that coincide with cultural or ethnic boundaries (e.g., Russian, Austro-Hungarian, and Ottoman empires). In these regions, Kohn argues, imagining the ethnic nation led to redrawing "political boundaries in conformity with ethnographic demands". Kohn, on the other hand, argues that in the "West", particularly in the United Kingdom, France, and the United States, nationalism was primarily political. Commenting on Kohn's theory, Shulman adds: "ideas of the nation and nationalism arose within pre-existing state structures that encompassed populations with a relatively high degree of cultural homogeneity". He continues: "Members of the [civic] nation were unified by their equal political status and their will as individuals to be part of the nation".

In light of Kohn and Shulman, a civic nation can be viewed as the opposite of an ethnic nation. A civic nation determines national group membership upon citizenship rights, rather than that of ancestry, marriage, or blood, as commonly found in an ethnic nation. A civic nation can be defined as "a community of equal, rights-bearing citizens, united in patriotic attachment to a shared set of political practices and values". Civic nation building envisions "one people" with a common sense of "we", but not in the sense that "we" derive from a particular ethnicity or religion. Civic nationalism separates culture and state whereas ethnic nationalism joins them. In summary, a civic nation allows individuals to define the national community rather than having the national community define the individual, which is not necessarily the case in an ethnic nation. As such, an ethnic nation abandons the idea that national belonging is a choice and not an inheritance. (*To be continued in the next issue*)

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